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ABSTRACT

This book interprets contemporary attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about race in the United States, noting that race is fundamentally a moral problem. It challenges readers to distinguish the varied manifestations of this racialized worldview, from extreme racism to racial insensitivity and ignorance, which carry different moral valences. It suggests the need for a more varied and nuanced moral vocabulary for discussing race, explaining that the growing tendency to castigate as racism everything that goes wrong in the racial domain reduces the term's power to evoke a moral outrage. The book develops a historically grounded account of racism as the deeply morally charged notion it has become, examines whether people of color can be racist, defines types of racism, and identifies debased and inappropriate usages of the term. It suggests that though racial insensitivity, racial anxiety, racial ignorance and racial injustice are not racism, they are racial ills that should elicit moral concern. It notes that race itself is a morally destructive idea implying moral distance and unequal worth and suggests that people can give up the idea of race. (Contains approximately 375 references.) (SM)

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